

**A Demographic Snapshot of Springfield's
"East Side"**

Notes Prepared for East Springfield Summit
March 23, 2009

Norm Sims, Executive Director, SSCRPC

Introductory Comments

Providing a demographic profile of Springfield's "East Side" presents a challenge in that there are differing opinions on just what constitutes its geographic boundaries. For some the East Side has become more of a description based upon perceptions than a specific geographic location.

It is also difficult because demographic data is not provided in this way. Much of what we know about the characteristics of the population comes from the U.S. Census¹, which divides areas up into often irregular tracts and blocks. So, for this snapshot I looked at six census tracts: 8, 15, 16, 17, 23 and 24. This is an area that runs, more or less, east of 10th street, north to about North Grand, mainly west of Dirksen, and south of Cornell. My guess is that most would accept this area as being indicative of the "East Side" for the purpose of discussion.

Using this area as our snapshot of the "East Side", this area is:

- *Predominately minority.*
- *Poorer than the city as a whole.*
- *Losing population.*
- *And has poorer housing stock than the city as a whole.*

I want to focus on these aspects of our snapshot because some of the factors are inter-related. And keep in mind that we are dealing with data from the 2000 Census, so it is almost 10 years old, but we are likely to find the trends I'm going to mention continuing in the 2010 Census.

It Is Predominately Minority

The percentage of Springfield's population reported as "black" in the last Census was 15.3%. In this area it is about 61%, or almost four times the number of minority residents as the City as a whole.

It Is Poorer Than the City as a Whole

In 2000 almost 35% of the population in this area was living below the Federal poverty level, compared to a City rate of less than 12%. This was an improvement, however, as in 1990 about 39% of the residents in the area were below the poverty level. While this

¹ A complete analysis of demographics based upon the 2000 Census is available in *2000 Census Analysis: Springfield & Sangamon County, Illinois*. Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission. August 2004.

may not seem like much of a change, changes above 3% are often indicative of a shift, so it is worth watching and studying to see what factors may be at work that would explain the change.

Demographers often look at median household income as a good indicator of wealth. In the 2000 Census the percentage of the population in this area with a median household income below \$25,000 per year was 57%. Keep in mind that the median household income City-wide was \$39,388.

It's probably useful to note that the area/city differentials are marginally different from what I am reporting. I did not factor out the tracts studied from the City as a whole, meaning that the lower percentages for this area would tend to marginally bring down the City average. If they were factored out of the City average, we would most likely find a marginally larger disparity.

So if this area is poorer than the City as a whole it would be reasonable to ask "why?" There is a great deal of debate among demographers as well as policy makers about the 'ultimate', or first, causes of poverty. But there is much less debate about the 'proximate', or related, factors. Some of these proximate factors show up in the area studied. For example:

■ ***Single parent households:***

- In the area studied, 22% of households with children were female-headed households. In the 2000 Census we saw a City-wide increase in single-parent, female-headed households (and recent studies show this to be increasing), but as a percentage of all households, we find much of this increase focused in east-side census tracts.

■ ***A younger population:***

- It is intuitive that younger populations tend to have less access to wealth than older populations. Also, households with more children tend to have less disposable income than households with fewer children, all things being equal, as the children have needs that must be met yet they produce little if any income.
- In the six tracts studied, almost 1/3 of the population was under 18 years-of-age, compared to the City average of 24%.
- Conversely, city-wide 15% of the population was over 65, and in this area it is about 13%. So, it is a slightly younger population at both ends of the age spectrum.
- Overall, and given that this area is predominately African-American, it is important to note that the median age for blacks county-wide is 26.4 years, and whites 38.8 years. It is 31.8 years in the area studied, except for one thing. If census tract 15 is taken out of the calculations, the median age in the area drops to 29.2 years. Keep census tract 15 in mind, because it is going to come up again.

■ ***Poorer educational attainment:***

- Related to poverty we know that wealth correlates with education: the better the population's educational attainment, the greater its income.

- In Springfield about 87% of the population has a high school diploma or equivalent. In this area it is only 68%, or 19 points below the City average.
 - Only about 7.5% of the residents of the area studied have a college degree compared to 31% City-wide, for a 23.5 point difference.
 - Some of this disparity may be explained by the difference in age of the population in the six census tracts compared to the City as a whole, but:
 - The City-wide school drop-out rate in the 2000 Census was 12%. In this area it was 16%. A noticeable but not great difference. However, the 2000 Census showed census tract 15 reporting a zero drop-out rate in 2000 (!). If that tract is taken out of our figures, the drop-out rate in our east-side snapshot area is 22.4%, tending toward twice the city-wide rate.
 - Again, there is something different about tract 15.
- ***Fewer in the area are in the labor force:***
- As we might expect, when an area has a younger, more poorly educated population, fewer of its members will end up in the labor force.
 - County-wide (we did not have a City-wide average), 69% of the population is in the labor force. In this area only 55.3%.
 - And the job classification data indicates that those in the labor force were working lower skilled – and therefore lower paid – jobs. This is as we would expect given age and educational attainment.

The Area Is Losing Population

One would think that an area with a younger population might trend toward an increase in population. But that is not the case in the area studied.

Between 1990 and 2000, while the City population grew by about 6% -- a small but stable rate of growth – this area lost over 16%: a 22% differential. But we wanted not just to consider total population but also families or resident groupings, as growth in here might be expected to be an indicator of area stability. One surrogate for this is number of households. Between 1990 and 2000, while the number of households in the City grew by 8%, this area lost almost 19% of its households: a 27% differential.

Areas can generally gain population in two ways: births and in-migration. We would expect that a younger population would have increased births leading to some population increase absent in-migration. But this area shows a decline in population. It would appear that out-migration from the area is far out-stripping births and any in-migration. The simple interpretation is that those outside the area do not wish to live there, and neither do those who currently live there.

These Factors Feed on Themselves Affecting Housing Stock

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of housing units in the City grew by 11%, but this area lost 12%. This should not be a surprise given the loss of both population and households in the area. This loss, and the effect of poverty, affects housing market demand.

The housing stock in the area studied is generally older than the City as a whole. City-wide the percentage of housing units built since 1980 was 29%, but in this area it was only 11.3%. However, census tract 15 again skews the data. When census tract 15 is taken out of the figures, only about 6% of the housing stock in the area was built since 1980.

This shows up in home values. The median value of an owner-occupied unit in the City was \$88,600 in 2000, but in this area it was only \$44,950, about a 50% differential.

Closing Comments

Most likely the figures above do not tell you anything you didn't suspect and may represent things you don't want to hear. No ten minute presentation can provide a clear picture of what is going on demographically in any area, and I have not tried to. I have tried to present data related to demographic factors that seem to be particularly important in assessing the future of the "East Side". There are two important stories in this data.

What we should want to see in any area is a "vital cycle", where sustained and stable growth is occurring and feeding on itself, creating an environment for even more sustained and stable growth. What these figures indicate is the potential presence of a "vicious cycle", where decline begins to set the stage for even further decline. Vicious cycles do not become vital ones due to market or demographic forces alone, or seldom do. Some intervention may be required, and if the change in number of residents living below the federal poverty line is an indication, perhaps some of that is happening.

The other story relates to our 'different' census tract; tract 15. It may be worth studying why this tract is performing differently from the others. This tract is the one located more-or-less south and east of the intersection of Clear Lake and 11th Street. It is bounded by Madison Park Place (which is in tract 8) to the north, includes an SHA high-rise and a care facility, as well as development along 11th Street. It has an older residential area, but one that at least anecdotally appears much more stable. Aspects of this tract might be worth comparing with other "east side" areas to determine similarities and dissimilarities that can be taken into account in future planning.